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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 002858

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIA ROUNDUP

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)
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11. (C) SERIES OF ARRESTS RELATED TO JUNE 2 ATTACKS
REPORTED: Human rights organizations have reported that fourteen men and boys from the Damascus suburb of Erbeen have been detained by the SARG as suspects in the June 2 attack in Damascus on the compound of the Syrian TV and Radio headquarters (ref A). A press release from the National Organization for Human Rights (NOHR) listed fourteen names, but did not include more specific information about the arrestees.

12. (C) Human rights activist and lawyer Haithem al-Maleh traveled to Erbeen June 13 to interview families whose relatives were connected to the attack and related his experiences to Poloff later the same day. Maleh was told by residents that all those arrested were under 18, and all those killed on the day of the attack were between the ages of 14 and 16. (NOTE: A press release by the London-based, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Syrian Human Rights Committee also stated that the five suspects killed during the shootout were between the ages of 14 and 17.) Maleh told Poloff that a total of 135 individuals, mainly family and friends of the suspects, have been detained and interrogated by the SARG regarding their connection to the accused group, with most being released following interrogations. Maleh speculated in a roundabout way to Poloff that Sheikh Mahmoud Qol-Aghassi (aka Abu Qaqaa) is behind the attack and had recruited the juveniles, adding that Qaqaa (who moved from Aleppo to Damascus-Mezzeh within the last year) used martial arts training as a recruiting tool during his time in Aleppo. Maleh apparently was making this link, at least in part, based on statements by the father of a deceased 14-year old attacker, who stated that his son told him he was participating in martial arts training. The father did not know where the training took place or who was sponsoring it.

13. (C) EX-DAMASCUS SPRING DETAINEE HOMSI LEAVES SYRIA, STARTS CAMPAIGN FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS: Former MP and ex-Damascus Spring detainee Ma'amoun al-Homsi announced June 14 in Beirut that he has relocated to Jordan. According to a Reuters news report, Homsi claimed he left Syria to "deliver the message of the Damascus Spring to the world -- save the political prisoners of Syria." He called on European countries to increase pressure on the SARG to release political prisoners, improve its human rights record, and introduce democracy. Should the SARG not change its policies, European countries should withdraw their

ambassadors, said Homs. (COMMENT: Whether Homs's move was motivated purely for political reasons is unclear. Fellow former Damascus Spring detainee Walid al-Bunni told Poloff in early June that the SARG had been confiscating many of Homs's assets and that at that time, Homs was already contemplating a move to Jordan. Homs, who has been critical of the SARG since his release (ref B), has a reputation as a shady businessman suspected of making his fortune through smuggling and dealings with Rifa'at and Basel al-Asad.)

¶4. (C) REPORTS OF UPCOMING RELEASE OF THREE DAMASCUS-BEIRUT DECLARATION SIGNATORIES CIRCULATE: According to a June 13 press statement by the National Organization of Human Rights, jailed Damascus-Beirut Declaration (DBD) signatories Mahmoud Mur'i, Ghaleb Amar, and Safwan Taifour are expected to be released shortly from SARG custody. The release follows the three men's testimony during a June 13 investigatory hearing that they had not signed the DBD, reject foreign aggression against Syria, and adhere to the Syrian Constitution. Human rights activist Faisal Badr noted to Poloff on June 14 that all three men were members of the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, headed by Hassan Abdulazeem, and speculated that Abdulazeem had used his long-rumored SARG connections to have the men freed. However, as of the morning of June 15, the men remained imprisoned.

¶5. (C) WRITER SENTENCED TO SIX MONTHS IMPRISONMENT: The ar-Raqqa military court convicted civil society activist and writer Mohammed Ghanem of insulting the President, weakening the country's dignity during a time of war, and inciting sectarian feuds on June 6. Ghanem was sentenced to a year in prison, reduced to six months, and will be jailed in ar-Raqqa. Ghanem, who operated the regime-critical Internet website surion.org and is Alawite, was arrested March 31 by Syrian Military Intelligence officers (ref C).

DAMASCUS 00002858 002 OF 002

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